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# OUR INSANE NEIGHBOR; HIS RIGHTS AND OURS.

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BY W. W. GODDING, M.D.,  
Author of "Two HARD CASES."

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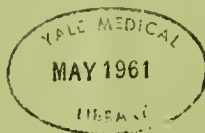
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AN INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

I AM aware that I shall be met at the outset of this discussion by the suggestion that the rights of the insane have already been practically settled, and the afflicted man taken to the asylum. Certainly we are a Christian people, and we feel a commendable pride in the imposing structures which the State has provided for the care of these unfortunates. Our hospitals for the insane stand as exponents—examples, too, of the best class—of the good that can be accomplished by that organized charity wherein we are never weary of doing good by proxy, without any individual discomfort to ourselves. One looking on these vast piles of masonry, and remembering their benevolent design, might readily fancy that here the evangel of "good will to men," that fell once on suffering humanity, soft as the dew from heaven, had, in later ages, becoming systematized, hardened into stone. "Are there no prisons?" demands Scrooge, in the Christmas story, when called upon to show a little individual benevolence; "And the union workhouses, are they still in operation?" The question, "Who is my neighbor?" is a very old one, and, like that still earlier query, "Am I my brother's keeper?" is not usually asked for information, but put forward as a foil by those who want nothing whatever to do with what is to them a very disagreeable subject. In this æsthetic age the management of unpleasant things is made as

little obtrusive as possible. We have improved on the old Egyptian method; long since the last skeleton, released from duty at his banquets, went to the same quiet repose which for centuries has wrapped the now mummied greatness for whose admonition that exhibition was intended. We, too, keep "a skeleton in the house," but we do not thrust its loathsome anatomy upon our guests. Having no use for it in the dining-room, we lock it in a closet, throw away the key, and try to persuade ourselves that it has no existence. But, though unbidden, and not mentioned above a whisper, the spectre is never wanting at our feast; step by step, keeping pace with our ever advancing civilization, still stalks the growing shadow of brain decay, with its attendants, apoplexy and insanity. We lock up our insane man in the hospital, and think that we are rid of him; vain is our selfish hope; we cannot thus shake him off, for is he not our neighbor? nay, may he not be our brother? worse yet, at the next turn, what shall prevent that this insanity may not happen even to ourselves? and we shrink back at the prospect, as Lear, when he finds his brain going, exclaims—

"O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!"

Since, then, this disagreeable neighbor has claims upon us which cannot safely be ignored, would it not be well to take time to consider what the rights of the insane man really are? and in the consideration of those rights not to be unmindful of our own?

In this introduction, which is designed merely as a preliminary paper, I shall only indicate the outlines, as it were, of this inquiry. While all insane men have their rights, it by no means follows that they all have the same rights. Until the insane become a majority, society will continue to shut up its lunatics; when the majority have lost their wits, it matters very little what becomes of society; discussion will then be carried on with a shot-gun. I do not address my remarks to those times. It is idle to contend for the rights of a dangerous lunatic at large in the community; he has no right there; he belongs in some institution where he can be restrained from doing mischief to himself or others. Once within the walls of that institution, his rights begin. One natural division of our

subject, then, will be the rights of the insane in places of detention; and this division is certainly of sufficient importance to be entitled to a paper by itself.

Then there is that great field of social study and psychological puzzle, which I may truly say embraces within its limits "all sorts and conditions of men," from the borderland of perpetual motion and the philosopher's stone, with its so-called "harmless cranks," who now and then become dangerous, down through the varying shades of insane diathesis, frenzied inebriety, ecstatic devotion and mild melancholy, to that "Poor Ned" whom "it pleased God to form of idiot mind," the partial dementia, the quiet vacuity of brain disease, that pitying relatives cover from the light. All these and very many more whom we call partially insane, who, being in the world, are not of it—they have no apparent place in the economy of creation, but flit as shadows over the arenas of human action in a life which is only a dream—these suggest a second natural division of our subject; the rights of the insane in the community at large; a division important in its bearings, and so vast as to be in no danger of exhaustion in the space of an ordinary paper.

One other right of the insane remains; the right to protection in the courts of law; a right affecting both person and property; a right not to be relinquished or abated when the multitude, stung to madness by some terrible tragedy—all the more terrible because the chief actor is insane—are wildly clamoring for blood. This important right of the insane man in court and under sentence of the law will furnish the subject of discussion for the final paper of this series.

Thus very hastily I have indicated the three natural divisions of what seems to me a very proper subject for a study in social science. The insane, like the poor, are always with us; we cannot ignore them if we would; and I cannot but think that their claims upon us should be carefully considered, both as to their validity and their proper limitations. I, for one, shall embark in no wild crusade of universal enlargement. Having passed a third of the time the Psalmist allots us in their homes and their world, I may be pardoned for thinking that I know something of their life and its needs. To these studies,

conscientiously undertaken, with an honest purpose, I hope to bring no unkind feeling for any, no bitterness, and as little prejudice as may be. Though the Constitution is silent respecting them, there is one canon under which their rights can be assured—a canon which, unlike many another bill of rights, has for two thousand years needed no revision—"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." The Golden Rule will be recognized as the common law in these studies; a law that has not been repealed by any later enactments. So, putting ourselves in place of the insane, shall we be merciful, that we may obtain mercy."

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